

DOES HYPOCRISY REFUTE CHRISTIANITY'S TRUTH?

By Eric V. Snow

Do the sins of Christians refute Christianity? Do the Crusades and the Inquisition prove God's nonexistence and the Bible's falseness? Would the voyeurism of televangelist Jimmy Swaggert reveal that Jesus isn't humanity's Savior? Would we then accept it as a general principle that the (im)moral actions of any adherents of any belief system are a way to determine its ultimate truth? So then, if crusades refute Catholicism, do jihads refute Islam? If Pope Urban VIII's persecution of the great Italian scientist Galileo refutes Catholicism and/or theism, do Joseph Stalin's political attacks on Soviet scientists upholding Mendelian genetics in the name of Lysenkoism (i.e., evolution by acquired characteristics) refute Marxism and/or atheism? So can we reject a belief system based upon the bad behavior of those upholding it? In reality, bad behavior by atheists or theists can't logically prove or disprove the existence of God or the truth or falsity of any philosophical position or religion. The Crusades, the Inquisition, Western Imperialism, the transatlantic slave trade, the Irish Troubles, the Thirty Years War, etc., can't ultimately prove the falsehood of the Bible or of belief in God. The Bible could be perfectly true, and Jehovah could exist, yet people who believe in it and Him would have an evil human nature that causes them to fail to love others of their faith or outside of it.

The ubiquity of this bad, emotionally driven argument among people, whether academics or average folk, merely proves the shoddiness of their reasoning processes when it comes to searching for a way to disbelieve in the Bible's God because he makes moral demands of them that they wish to evade. A good example would be, "Because minister X committed adultery and/or theft, Christianity must be false, God's laws on sex and/or property don't exist, so then I can freely commit adultery and/or theft myself." Aldous Huxley, the British atheist intellectual who wrote the novel "Brave New World," among other things, admitted towards the end of his life the motives behind why he rationalized to an skeptical position: "I have motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption . . . For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom." Atheists have emotions and self-interested

reasons too, and thus will rationalize their own position as justified. For more on the rhetoric of atheism and role of imagination on why people accepted dogmatic disbelief in God in the past, see Alister McGrath, "The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World."

So suppose someone said, "Because atheists (meaning, the communists) slaughtered 100 million people in the 20th century, their bad behavior proves God's existence." That reasoning is just as sound a priori (before experience) as saying, "Because Catholics launched the Crusades and the Inquisition, therefore, God doesn't exist." The equivalency here is obvious: Bad ethics by adherents of a belief system doesn't prove or disprove anything ontologically or metaphysically. Consider in this context the Scottish philosopher David Hume's view that we can't go from an "is" to an "ought." This view is problematic, but it's still difficult to refute fully convincingly without using revelation. May it also work the other way conversely, using human reasoning alone?: We can't go from an "ought" to an "is"! That is, using a moral belief as a premise that condemns the behavior of someone, we can't as a conclusion then determine what entities exist in the universe and what their relationship is to humanity (i.e., what moral demands God or the gods do or might make of us and what the possible consequences are of disobeying Him or them).

But now, a deeper point emerges here that justifies an anti-atheist using the atheists' bad behavior in the 20th century to argue for God's existence: What restraints are there on atheists' own behavior, according to their own belief system? You can condemn a Christian who persecutes others based on his own religious revelation, the Bible, which means his behavior violates the Golden Rule, the command to turn the cheek, loving your neighbor as yourself, etc. But, given the atheists' own philosophical premises, what can they condemn their own bad behavior by if we happen to be agnostics or atheists ourselves? What is the source of moral absolutes to atheists? Indeed, precisely because they are atheists, they can act morally abominably, yet feel good about themselves theoretically! (Perhaps they might still feel guilty emotionally, but that's God's natural law witness in themselves, such as the Nazi concentration camp guards, Einsatzgruppen, etc. who felt they had to get drunk after killing Jews or afterwards felt the need to transfer out of doing such grisly duties for their Fuhrer). In the case of the communists who plotted and then later gained political power, any and all the lying and killing was a means to the end of abolishing capitalism and setting up the dictatorship of the proletariat and (theoretically later) the withering away of the state to establish equality, happiness, etc. for the mass of the people. Hence, the end justified the means (despite the evil methods used to achieve a goal would affect the ultimate "destination"), the goal of ridding the world of capitalism was to be done "by any means necessary." This was despite communism killed far more people by many orders of magnitude than the most ruthless and callous "robber barons" ever did. (It's hard to say ruthless business competitors like Rockefeller and

Hill actually killed anyone, while men like Gould and Fisk were basically high-level con artists). The Russian novelist Dostoevsky in "The Brothers Karamazov" (1880) criticized in truly prophetic words the setting up a socialism that ignored God: "In trying to bring about a just society without Christ, they will end up by flooding the world with blood, for blood cries out for more blood and he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword." Hence, the Russian revolution later had the Bolsheviks turn against each other and kill one another, were a partial fulfillment of this insightful prediction. (The same occurred during the French revolution as well, of course, as the case of Robespierre illustrates spectacularly. Dostoevsky may have had in mind the activities of the Committee of Public Safety when writing this).

But could a powerful reason for God's existence ultimately arise ironically from the sins of atheists? As C.S. Lewis argued in "Mere Christianity," our moral sense is derived indirectly from God even when we aren't believers in the Bible, as part of our created human nature. (See his "Abolition of Man" for more related material on this general subject). We can't condemn others' actions without believing in moral absolutes. But almost all atheists and agnostics deny moral absolutes. (Ayn Rand and her band of Objectivists are an interesting exception to this generalization, but since they deny the need for self-sacrifice for other people, we Christians would see their moral system as distinctly minimalistic at best). So how can an atheist condemn a past or present sinning Christian if he believes in moral relativism? Someone could always claim, while using atheists'/agnostics' moral/cultural relativism back at them, playing the Devil's advocate to expose the folly of their ethical position: "Well, slavery, the Crusades, the Inquisition, jihads, Apartheid, Jim Crow, female genital mutilation, Chinese foot binding, suttee, female infanticide, gulags, concentration camps, genocide, nuclear wars, imperialism, racial discrimination, poison gas, landmines, sexism, etc., etc., etc., may be wrong for you, but they are fine for us! So now you can't condemn us!" If the atheist/agnostic says the Christian is being hypocritical, by violating his own revelation's moral standards, that doesn't prove the unbeliever's own moral position intrinsically since he rejects God and the Bible's inspired truth. Therefore, because atheists' bad behavior is a logical consequence of their belief system's lack of a good source of moral absolutes, it's actually a *better* argument to say, "The sins of atheists refute atheism," than to say, "The sins of theists refute theism"!

Dostoevsky was deeply right when having another character comment on the skeptical Ivan Karamazov's intellectual position: "Crime must be considered not only as admissible but even as the logical and inevitable consequence of an atheist's position." (Although by using natural law theory they're ways to try to partially evade this kind of reasoning, such as by the respective approaches of C.S. Lewis, Ayn Rand, and James Q. Wilson, how ultimately convincing they are is another issue). Elsewhere, Dostoevsky has another character say: "Then, if there is no God, man becomes master of the earth and of the universe. That's

great. But then, how can a man be virtuous without God? That's the snag, and I always come back to it. For whom will man love then? Whom will he be grateful to? . . . We, for instance, may think that virtue is one thing while the Chinese may believe it's something quite different. Isn't virtue something relative then?" The bloody history of the religiously skeptical yet politically fanatical 20th century shows this snag indeed caught atheists and agnostics: Wasn't the Europe of the Nazis and Communists even morally darker than that of Medieval Catholicism at its collective worst?

This discussion naturally leads in to the related "problem of evil" that's long been used to deny the existence of a loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God: Could God exist and care while allowing all these moral atrocities to occur? Atheists and agnostics, however, can't condemn God for allowing evil to exist without believing in moral absolutes also. But since atheists and agnostics (mostly) uphold moral relativism, they can't use the problem of evil to deny God's existence logically! If you don't believe in evil, you then can't condemn God for allowing it!

But now, would the good behavior of true Christians witness to the world that they have the truth? What did Jesus tell His disciples the night before His crucifixion? "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). So now, shouldn't the good behavior of some Christians in their family and business lives convince the faithless to have faith? Admittedly, the text doesn't actually say that, but merely that people in the world would know Christ's true disciples from other people based on their love for one another. God has to call people for them to be truly converted: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). Hence, even (say) the amazing level of self-sacrifice of a Mother Teresa for India's poor won't convert automatically the Hindu masses of Calcutta to Catholicism. Rather, the good works of Christians simply remove an excuse for unbelief (cf. what King David's bad example in the case of Uriah the Hittite helped cause the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme Him, II Samuel 12:14). Hence, the sins of Christians largely serve as an excuse for unbelievers to deny the truth of the Bible so they need not undertake the difficult work of changing their lives and beliefs. But for actual proof that Jesus was who He said He was, He pointed to His relationship with His Father and how His life reflected that, including the miracles He did: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves" (John 14:10-11; cf. John 15:22, 24; 12:42-45). So although true Christians' love one for another would witness to the world that they are Jesus' disciples, that differs from the evidence miracles would serve as experientially or, alternatively, be like a formal proof of God's existence.

Ironically, the sins of past traditional Christians don't prove the falsity of Christianity metaphysically, but the atrocities committed by atheists help to prove atheism's falsity ethically. The crimes of Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot could all be seen as the logical consequences of their atheism, while the atrocities of (say) Catholics ignore and deny the correct interpretation of the inspired revelation that's (partially) their source of spiritual authority. The sins of traditional Christians contradict their overall belief system, but the crimes of atheists corroborate it!